

To: Duquesneburg Community Members

From: The DCS Board of Education

We would like to thank all of the community members who turned out for our Community Education Summit in January in support of our development of a district strategic plan. The district received a great amount of information from the community from the summit and from the community survey that was sent out in December.

There were a number of themes that were expressed in the survey and the summit results that resonated with the Board. Among the most common points made were:

- There is a high level of pride in our school district and in our students' high level of academic achievement.
- There is strong support from community members for our sports, band, choir, arts and extracurricular programs. Our community is deeply proud of the many and varied talents our students demonstrate in these programs, and there is strong support for maintaining and growing these programs.
- Community members and students are proud of our small-town environment and recognize the many benefits this brings to our students and our district as a whole.
- There is recognition that our buildings and grounds require a higher level of investment and maintenance to ensure we are providing the best possible environment for our students and employees.
- Better communications were seen as an area of focus for many community members. While use of the district website and School News Notifier (SNN) emails has grown, there was still a sense that more communication from the district would be a benefit to the community.
- There was strong sentiment that increased community involvement and outreach at all levels was needed, from volunteers for various programs to parental involvement in the classroom.
- One of the strongest points made was the need to expand educational opportunities for our students, especially at the high school level. There was a feeling expressed that recent budget cuts could threaten many of the advanced course offerings our students have available to them.
- There were still questions among community members about the fiscal state of the district and the long-term prospects for the district remaining independent.

The Board of Education has been working hard to take the information gathered from the survey and the summit and integrate it into a draft strategic plan. A number of initiatives have begun to follow up on the information received, including meeting with community groups to better understand how we can work together for the benefit of our

students. We will be reaching out to faculty and staff to begin the process of working with them to refine the strategic plan and examine suggestions and input received as we begin the process of preparing our 2014-2015 school budget.

Our district financial state is sound. Our reserves are at higher levels than most districts in the state and our long-range financial projections show that we are in very good shape to weather the recent state funding cuts. The New York State Comptroller's office recently released its fiscal stress analysis for New York State schools, and our district was shown to have the lowest level of fiscal stress. This is due in large part to sound management of our reserves and a long history of prudent spending.

At the same time, our district consistently places in the bottom third of taxes out of nearly 90 regional schools that we are rated against. With that low tax rate, we are also consistently ranked in the top 25% academically compared to regional schools, including many larger and wealthier districts.

While we have no plans to pursue consolidation or merger with other schools, we are constantly working to share services and expand programs for our students by working with neighboring districts. This has allowed us to expand our distance learning and sports programs and lowers our costs for services and supplies.

Our administration and the Board's Buildings & Grounds Committee have been working to review and update our 5-year Capital Plan to reflect the work that has been accomplished. A number of projects have been completed by district staff, and we continue to focus on maintenance and new upgrades to our facilities.

At the same time, we continue to review the effects of past budget cuts to best understand the impact they have on our students and our community. One example is the recent reinstatement of the late bus after it was determined that many students were not able to seek after school support from faculty due to a lack of transportation.

The Strategic Planning process is intended to be an ongoing process and we look forward to refining the plan in the coming weeks and months. We will be communicating our progress to the community regularly as we continue to listen and work to provide the best for the students of our district.

Sincerely,

The Duanesburg Board of Education